

How Children Pretend Play

Stage I: Imitative Role Play

In this initial stage of play, children try to act, talk, and dress like people they know. Children use real objects as props. They depend on an element of reality in their play. For instance, a child may pick up a telephone and pretend to "talk on the phone like Mommy" or hold a doll and "feed the baby."

Stage II: Make-Believe Play

In the second stage, children's play is enriched by their imaginations. Now less dependent on concrete props for role-playing, children may use a string as a firefighter's hose, or an envelope may be Mommy's briefcase. The ability to make-believe moves beyond the scope of real props or costumes. Children also learn to use their imaginations to invent actions and situations. Dramatic play is no longer confined to real-life events. At this stage, children often use such play to help them understand feelings or deal with fears and worries.

Stage III: Socio-Dramatic Play

Socio-dramatic play emerges at the time children begin seeking the company of others. Socio-dramatic play includes elements of imitative play and make-believe play; however, it stands apart from the earlier stages in that it requires verbal interaction between two or more children. Because of its interactive nature, socio-dramatic play necessitates planning. One child chooses to be the teacher and the other the student; one child can be a firefighter and the other a would-be victim. Because of its more complex story lines, socio-dramatic play requires that children spend a significant amount of time in this type of play.